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President Signs Matsui Legislation into Law

Important Consumer and Safety Protections Put in Place for Americans At Sea

WASHINGTON, DC— Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) joined President Barack Obama for a White House signing ceremony of H.R. 3360, the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, legislation introduced by Rep. Matsui. The Congresswoman and the President were joined by Laurie Dishman, a Sacramento, CA resident and a constituent of Rep. Matsui's, who wrote to her Representative after being sexually assaulted on a cruise ship – and asked for help. After several Congressional hearings which brought to light the gross inadequacies of current safety requirements on cruise ships, Rep. Matsui introduced H.R. 3360 in the House of Representatives. After passing the House and Senate with bipartisan support, the bill was sent to the President for his signature earlier this month.

“The President’s signature on this legislation is a significant milestone for American consumers and the traveling public,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “H.R. 3360 will improve the safety and security of all cruise ship passengers traveling in and out of U.S. waters, and provide common-sense security measures to prevent crimes from occurring – and protections and support for victims and their families if and when they do. I applaud the President for enacting this important legislation and thank the many people who have been such a crucial part of making this bill a reality.”

“Congresswoman Matsui has taken the lead on this very important issue and has helped raise awareness about crimes on cruise ships all over the world,” Laurie Dishman said. “I cannot thank her enough for not only answering my letter, but for helping to make it safer for passengers when taking a cruise. She truly is my hero and has stood by my side for the past four years. It was an honor to stand with her once again today, and to personally thank the President for enacting legislation that will make sure no one will ever again have to go through what I did. On behalf of victims and their support networks all around the world – thank you.”

Rep. Matsui started advocating for the modernization of existing legislation in 2006 after reading Laurie’s letter. From that first step, Rep. Matsui has since worked with her colleagues in the House and the Senate, non-profits, and victims’ rights organizations to move this bill forward. Specifically, the International Cruise Victims Association (ICV), a nonprofit organization that

represents victims of crimes on cruise ships, and the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN) have been instrumental in bringing awareness to this issue and working with Congresswoman Matsui and Senator John Kerry (D-MA) to build support for the legislation in Congress.

“Today marks the beginning of a new accountability for any crimes that are committed against passengers on cruise ships,” said Ken Carver, President of ICV. “This came about because a small group of victims joined together four and one-half years ago to form ICV. From just a few families, ICV now has membership in over 20 countries. The lesson learned from this is that no one should ever underestimate the power of organized victims, who all are volunteers, to make changes. The passage of this legislation would not have happened without the dedicated support of Sen. Kerry and Rep. Matsui who joined our efforts to pass this historic legislation. This legislation will protect millions of passengers in the coming years and we are deeply indebted to all of those that help make this happen.”

“The term ‘duty free’ does not apply to the safety of passengers,” said Senator Kerry, who sponsored companion language in the Senate. “Murky lines of jurisdiction are no longer an excuse for risking the safety of millions of Americans who will board cruise ships this year.”

The legislation is a critical and common-sense fix which will provide safety and security to Americans who go on cruise vacations without realizing they are not protected under U.S. laws when they leave its territorial waters. Congresswoman Matsui’s legislation requires the cruise industry to comply with a number of security provisions including specific rail heights, peep holes, warning devices, and cabin security measures. For example, it necessitates that vessels are equipped with a video surveillance system to assist in documenting and prosecuting crimes, and requires vessels to maintain a log book to record reports on specified complaints. The law also mandates cruise vessel personnel to contact both the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the United States Coast Guard as soon as a crime involving homicide, suspicious deaths, missing U.S. nationals, kidnapping, assault, and other serious occurrences are reported.

Scott Berkowitz, President and Founder of RAINN added, “RAINN applauds Congresswoman Matsui for her leadership on this important legislation, which reduces passengers’ risk of sexual assault, and expands the rights of those sexually assaulted on board. By connecting cruise passengers with the support services available through the National Sexual Assault Hotlines, this legislation provides a vital lifeline for victims on cruise ships. We look forward to working with the cruise industry to ensure that passengers in need receive the help that they deserve.”

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